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ABSTRACT

Part I of this two-part article on technology (specifically, computers) and equal education points out three dangers which will increase the opportunity gap between the haves and the have-nots in the United States: (1) the replacement of educational equity by technology education as a national priority; (2) existing differences in educational opportunity being exacerbated by disparities between affluent and poor school districts and the impact of the disparities on the ability to acquire technology; and (3) the differences in personal resources between students from affluent homes and poverty homes and their personal ability to acquire technology in the home. Part II deals with Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI) for limited-English-speaking (LEP) populations who are commonly also minority, economically disadvantaged students. An analysis of microcomputer utilization in public schools reveals four categories of problems: (1) children in wealthier school districts have at least twice as much accessibility to computers as do children in poorer districts; (2) there is limited and inequitable participation by special populations (the limited-English-speaking, minorities, and the economically disadvantaged); (3) available software is inappropriate, culturally and instructionally, for special populations; and (4) under these circumstances, there are few current benefits for special populations. National and state policies that address these points and that provide adequate funding can ensure that the new technology will work to enhance eduational equity rather than preempt it. (CMG)

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INTERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH ASSOCIATION
IDRA newsletter

FEBRUARY 1983

HIGH TECHNOLOGY AND EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

by José A. Cárdenas Ed.D.

A review of the literature in education today leaves no doubt but that the decade of the 1980s will be known as the decade of high technology. The literature is replete with articles, books, and materials dealing with the impact of the new technology on education and the impact of education on the new technology. Recent advances in electronics, in computers, in automation, and even the more recent robots preclude any other topic surfacing to match technology as the predominant educational concern.

The impact of technology has been felt in industry with hundreds of communities attempting to attract the silicon chip, in business with electronic inventions becoming more commonplace, and in education with its recent infatuation with the computer.

As in the other two fields, industry and business, the impact of the computer is reciprocal; that is, the computer plays a part in the outcomes of education and is also a growing part of the process of education. Computer skills will continue to become an important aspect of educational activity, with no student being considered as educated without being well-versed in computer language and having a sufficient amount of "hands on" time at a computer terminal. It is conceivable that in a few years simple languages such as BASIC and its many derivatives will be as common in the school as foreign languages, even at the elementary school level. FORTRAN, COBOL, RPG, etc. will be taught at appropriate levels. This knowledge will then be combined with career subjects for student entrance into the work force, or be utilized for subsequent learning.

The process of education is similarly being impacted by the computer; that is, the computer is being utilized as a technical tool for instructional purposes. Computer-assisted instruction (CAI) is being used for the teaching of reading, language, mathematics, sciences, social studies, and almost every other area of the curriculum.

It is inconceivable that so drastic a change in educational process and product will come about without an accompanying change in federal intervention in education. Though education has been perceived as a state function and a local responsibility, it historically has been a federal interest. The implications of high technology in industry, business, politics, and the military are such that we can soon expect a new federal policy in education which will make computers in education a national priority. This prioritizing will be accompanied by the necessary legislation providing massive funds for the acquistion of hardware, the development of software, the training and retraining of teachers, and any and all resources needed for the schools to respond to the new priority.

These predictions do not require a unique psychic or a polished crystal ball. History repeats itself, and the history of the relationship between the federal government and education is full of similar examples of federal intervention to accompany an intense federal interest.

The Northwest Ordinance of the eighteenth century, the Morrill Act of the Civil War, the Smith-Hughes Act of World War I, the National Defense Education Act of the 1950s, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of the 1960s teach us that the federal government engages strongly in education in a time of national crisis. History also teaches us that when the crisis subsides, education again becomes a state right and the federal government disengages. Perhaps there is one other lesson to be learned, and an important one at that; namely that whereas national crises previously occurred at intervals of several decades, the interval between such occurrences is diminishing and one crisis is hardly ended before the next one takes place. Thus the civil rights crises of the last three decades, though ameliorated, have not ended before the country faces the challenge of the technological revolution. While the federal government has started to implement the disengagement from education as part of the ideology of the new federalism, powerful new forces are pushing it into the new engagement of the high technology.

It appears that the federal government will have come full cycle within one generation if the demands of the new technology are met by the government. It seems like only yesterday that the national priority was technological. The schools appeared wholly absorbed with the development of science, mathematics and the technology necessary for building atomic submarines and getting an American first to the moon. We built the submarines, missiles, atomic bombs, and laser beams and we walked on the moon. In the process we also changed to the new math and the new approaches to science, though it was inevitable that someone question whether the mathematics

cont. pg. 2

High Tech and Equal Opportunity

cont. from pg. 1

most appropriate for submarine building and moon walking was also most appropriate for the millions of kids who would not participate in either.

So the new math died on the vine though few people noticed because the country was involved in a new national priority--the issue of educational equity. This issue continued as a national priority for two decades and is about to be plucked from the vine just before it ripens as the country moves into a new national educational priority.

As one reads over the profusion of literature on the high technology, some of it appears vaguely familiar and some of it appears very familiar. The professional demands of the new technology for engineers, electronic experts, and computer experts is similar to the earlier needs for submarine builders. The need for fluency in computer languages is similar to the foreign language fluency needs addressed by the National Defense Education Act of the 1950s. The retraining of teachers to teach or to simply use computer science is reminiscent of the massive retraining in the new mathematics. What initially appears to be a flashback is in truth a cycling of national priorities in education, with the sole exception that the silicon chip rather than the atom is the basic unit of instruction.

The cyclic reemergence of technology as a national priority is not undesirable nor is it detrimental if, and this is a very big if, if education proceeds from its place in time and does not regress thirty years in time. There is no reason to believe that the emergence of equity as a national priority in the 60s and 70s was undesirable, nor was it detrimental. It provided improved educational opportunities for millions of children and in my opinion was on the verge of a dramatic breakthrough in the realization of educational equity as the past investments were starting to produce returns when the federal government initiated an ill-timed disengagement from their equity endeavors.

The key to the federal engagement in the new technology is that it be coordinated with past and present efforts in the equity issue rather than being implemented as a replacement for the equity issue.

Differences in educational opportunity are going to be exacerbated by the new technology. Disparities in educational funds between affluent and low-wealth school districts and differences in personal resources between rich and poor kids will widen the achievement levels between the two. Studies of the dispersion of computer equipment in the nation's schools today show that the distribution is already extremely lopsided. Computer equipment is concentrated in the wealthiest schools and few students from low income homes have seen one, let alone accumulated hands-on time.

If we look at the three roles of the computer in education we can predict a continuous worsening of the existing situation over the next few years.

1. The role of the computer in the management of instruction will increase the advantage of pupils in high-wealth school districts. Teachers and support personnel are receiving powerful instructional tools which will expand their ability to teach, while the lack of computer availability in low-wealth schools will perpetuate their inability to cope with the existing problems of teaching the disadvantaged, the minorities, and the limited English proficient.

2. The role of the computer as a product of education will similarly hamper the employability and further training of the disadvantaged. Funding limitations in low-wealth schools are so severe that it is conceivable that years from now, in the midst of the age of high technology and computers, these schools will be graduating pupils who have never seen, let alone have had access to, a computer. It is no exaggeration to make this analagous to a school graduating a secretary today who has never seen or had access to a typewriter.

3. The role of the computer in the process of education will again penalize students in low-wealth school districts. There is every indication that computer-assisted instruction will revolutionize the quality and the quantity of educational programs. This impact will not be felt in schools without the resources for the implementation of the new technology for instructional purposes. A brief review of the emerging software indicates that, similar to the curriculum of the pre-equity era, it is a curriculum developed for White, Anglo-Saxon, English-speaking, middle-class children. The computer-assisted instructional programs make no attempt to bring about any compatibility between them and the characteristics of atypical student populations.

A concern for the impact of the new technology on equality of educational opportunity rests on the assumption that the new technology will preempt educational equity as the dominant and almost exclusive national priority. Needless to say, this does not necessarily have to be so. A preferred alternative is the integration of the new technology into the existing national priorities and development of the necessary strategies for the implementation of an integrated effort involving the two concerns without a detrimental exclusivity.

During the next few years educators, social scientists, politicians, and technicians will be gathering at various conferences to map out a plan for the fulfillment of the next decade or two as a new era in education. It can only be hoped that in these sessions there will be concern for the continued expansion and development of all of the resources of this country, and that the new educational strategies developed and implemented will be conducive for giving expanded opportunities to all children.

INTERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH ASSOCIATION
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HIGH TECHNOLOGY AND EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY - PART II

by José A. Cárdenas, Ed.D.

The February, 1983 issue of the IDRA Newsletter *carried an article by Dr. José A. Cárdenas entitled "High Technology and Equal Educational Opportunity." Since the printing of the article several things have happened. First, IDRA has received an unusually large amount of correspondence in response to the article. Most of the feedback supports the theme of the article and requests further inquiry into the potential problems. Second, IDRA has been involved in extensive activities related to computer-assisted instruction (CAI) and special populations. Third, additional information has surfaced regarding the impact of technology on educational equity. In the light of these subsequent developments, this article is intended as an expansion of the issues presented in the previous article.*

Synopsis of the original article: *The author traces the history of federal government involvement in education and identifies three dangers which will tend to increase the opportunity gap between the haves and have-nots in our society. The three dangers are: 1) the replacement of educational equity by technology education as a national priority, 2) existing differences in educational opportunity being exacerbated by disparities between affluent and low-wealth school districts and the impact of these disparities on the ability to acquire technology, and 3) the differences in personal resources between students from affluent and poverty homes and their personal ability to acquire technology in the home.*

Narrowing the Technology Gap

The widening of the opportunity gap as a result of the new technology continues. Unfortunately, the growth in disparities will not diminish until several steps are taken to remedy the existing situation. The first necessary step is the development of policy concerning educational technology utilization in the schools. The acquisition of technical equipment by the schools has occurred for the most part in the absence of any national or state leadership. In fact, recent studies indicate that the bulk of microcomputers currently found in the nation's schools was acquired with local funds, most often purchased by PTAs and other local support groups. Yet, it the microcomputer will impact education to the extent being claimed in all the media, PTA purchases (which are based upon a wide range of PTA purchasing power) are too haphazard a resource for the introduction of educational innovation. As is the case for almost any type of educational expenditure, if it is important enough to justify the expenditure of funds, it is important enough to include in the school finance structure. It is regrettable that what is considered the most important innovation in education in the last few decades should come in through the back door in the absence of state and national policy and support.

The second step needed to forestall a widening of the technological opportunity gap is the equalization of resources between high- and low-wealth schools. This problem has been with us for half a century now and, after much litigation and legislation, remains a problem in all but a few of the fifty states with favorable post-*Rodriguez* court cases. Suffice it to say that the opportunity gaps existing prior to high technology utilization in the schools will grow exponentially in future years.

The third step in reducing the impact on educational opportunity is enhancing the appropriateness of technological developments for utilization by nontypical populations. The three most significant special populations requiring appropriate technological tools are minorities, the economically disadvantaged, and the limited English proficient (LEP). The remainder of this article will deal with CAI for non-English speaking populations who are commonly also minority and disadvantaged.

CAI Responsiveness to LEP Needs

Demographically, the growing limited English proficient population is significant enough to warrant special consideration in the field of computer-assisted instruction. The 1980 U.S. Census identified 30 million non-English speaking persons in the country, though there is every reason to believe that undocumented aliens and missed counts would result in an even larger figure. This population is expected to increase to 40 million in the next 16 years under normal conditions, and even more so if proposed immigration policy changes are implemented in the near future. In 1976 school-age children ages five to fourteen who did not speak English constituted 2.5 million. By the year 2000 this number is expected to increase to 3.4 million, with over 95 percent of the increase occurring in the Spanish-speaking population. In contrast, there are only some 32,000 certified bilingual teachers nationwide, and a current need for 72,500 additional bilingual teachers to meet the educational needs of LEP children.

cont. pg. 2

High Tech - Part II

cont. from pg. 1

The potential for CAI as an educational response for the limited English proficient is large, not only because of the size of the population and the lack of teacher resources, but because the characteristics of CAI make this educational tool appropriate for special populations. The varying characteristics of the limited English proficient from absolutely no English proficiency to slightly below grade-level proficiency is multiplied by a similar range in fluency in the native language. CAI can easily identify these characteristics and present an individualized program compatible with the existing needs. Differences in individual ability to acquire a new language can best be accomodated in self-paced computer programs.

It is important to note that the author is most conscious of the limitations of CAI in the acquisition of a new language. The most effective technique for language acquisition is extensive meaningful and profitable interaction between the learner and a trained speaker of the new language. It is doubtful that any but the most sophisticated multimedia approaches even approximates the ideal. However, CAI is an important response for two reasons. First, it can provide an extensive amount of reinforcement and practice as a supplement to the teacher's efforts, and second, it provides extensive relief and release time for the teacher to devote to intensive interaction with very small numbers of students. It is a constant frustration to see teachers who are working with small numbers of children in language development activities assign unimportant and often trivial busy work to the rest of the students. CAI is a far more superior reinforcing activity for children in English-as-a-second language programs than the prevalent coloring assignments that appear to dominate the time LEP children spend not interacting with the teacher.

Criteria for CAI Suitability

In reviewing the available information concerning the use of computers by special populations, IDRA staff identified a number of studies and publications which have addressed this topic. In addition to the available literature, several surveys of in-school computer utilization have been conducted which shed some light on the status of computer utilization by special populations, although most such surveys were not intended to focus on special populations.

Lindsey reports severe limitations on the availability of software for handicapped pop ilations in spite of extensive attention given in other publications to the potential special benefits of CAI for this target population. Another thought-provoking work on the use of microcomputers by the disadvantaged was performed by John P. Lipkin of the Litigation Support Services under a National Institute of Education contract. His analysis of various studies led him to conclude that, ". . . microcomputer purchases are closely tied to the ability of the school districts to afford them."

In determining equity in the use of microcomputers in schools, much of the available literature uses a model provided by Brookover and Lezotte. They provide three criteria for determining the equity in computer utilization: (1) the access criterion, which is the equality of accessibility by all students, (2) the participation criterion, which is the extent to which practices and programs guarantee equal participation, and (3) the benefits criterion, which is the extent to which all users benefit in a nondiscriminatory manner. To these three criteria, IDRA staff would add a fourth criterion--the appropriateness criterion, which is the extent to which the materials are appropriate for use by special populations.

In spite of the limitations of information available, the application of the access criterion indicates that children in higher wealth school systems have at least twice as much accessibility to computers as do children in low-wealth school systems. In addition to the findings stated previously, Lipkin concludes that funds used for the purchase of microcomputers by the schools appear to break down as follows: 10 percent from federal funds, 20 percent from state funds, and 70 percent from local funds.

Local funds are fairly evenly divided into voluntary contributions (30 percent of total) and local school funds (40 percent of total). Local school funds come primarily from materials and supplies budgets with an additional source being contingency funds. It should be noted that low-wealth school districts have very limited materials and supplies budgets and contingency funds are nonexistent.

Further observations should be made of federal funds as a future source of funding for microcomputer acquisition. First, federal funds provide only about 8 percent of total school budgets, an amount too small to be consequential in the future distribution of computer equipment. Furthermore, the percentage of federal funds in education is at the lowest level in ten years and there is a good

cont. pg. 3

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High Tech - Part II

cont. from pg. 2

possibility that it may go lower. In addition to these concerns, it should also be noted that other studies indicate that the allocation of federal funds in block grants has resulted in an increase in the use of the money for the purchase of microcomputers by the schools. This implies that the use of federal funds for computer acquisition has been at the expense of funding for special populations. Because most computer programs fail in the appropriateness criterion, it appears that the use of federal funds for purchasing computers has resulted in a diminished supply of resources for special populations without providing benefits in use for these populations.

The application of the participation criterion indicates limited and inequitable participation by special populations. In the case of the LEP population, there is almost a complete absence of programs available for non-English and limited English speakers. A review of various source books and catalogs failed to identify but one or two software programs which may be used by LEP children. Several of the limited listings for English language development were studied with disappointing results. For the most part, the programs were intended for use by adults having a high level of literacy (usually a post secondary educational background) in some other language. Though some of these programs may have value for newly arrived immigrants with professional status, they are worthless for LEP children in elementary and secondary schools. Several school districts responded to my previous article with information about local efforts at computer curriculum development focusing on English-as-a-second language, but most of the programs are in the formative stages and are not nearly extensive enough to impact on the problem.

It is already apparent that the application of the benefits criterion will indicate so few current benefits for special populations that the promise of a technological revolution in educational programs for them not only has not materialized, but is not prone to occur in the foreseeable future.

Nonetheless, a model program for limited English proficient children can be easily conceptualized. The acquisition of financial and personnel resources for its development is a much more formidable problem. The model should contain four elements commonly found in bilingual education programs. An English-as-a-second language (ESL) program presented in a systematic structured process and compatible with recent findings in the field of language development and linguistics should be included, as should a program of native language instruction to continue cognitive and basic skill development while English is being acquired. A transition program for the transfer of skills and learning to the newly acquired English language is also essential. The fourth element is an ESL program for young adults and adult populations, who differ from children in language acquisition characteristics. The ESL program can be developed by a team of experts in the areas of ESL, linguistics, curriculum development, and computer applications. The biggest problems in development will probably be the aggregation of experts in the identified areas and the possibility that only simplistic materials will emanate due to the constraints of available resources. The old adage, "Don't plan vast projects with half-vast resources," certainly appears to hold true in the development of ESL software programs.

Another potential pitfall is the possibility that an extensive amount of material development will occur at the lowest levels of learning. Contrary to popular opinion, CAI is not limited to drill and practice. The computer lends itself to far more intricate forms of learning. Learning forms ranking above drill and practice that are suitable for computer applications are tutorial, simulations, problem solving, and educational games. To a certain extent, the application of Brookover and Lezotte's participation and benefit criteria already identifies an overabundance of drill and practice (the lowest form of computer learning) in programs utilized with the less affluent, the rural, and the inner-city populations. Watt observed this phenomenon along with significant variations in the utilization of the computer in the context of programming and computer awareness. The following observation by Watts surfaces frequently in the literature on equity and computer utilization, ". . . affluent students are thus learning to tell the computer what to do, while less affluent students are learning to do what the computer tells them." In other words, the rich are manipulating computers, while the poor are being manipulated by computers. Program development for the limited English proficient must make a strong conscious effort to resist the temptation of producing simplistic drill and practice and tutorial programs and aspire to the production of the more sophisticated computer applications, such as simulations, problem solving exercises, and educational games.

Above all, the computer materials development team must exercise extreme caution in differentiating between material which can best be presented through teacher/student interaction and material which can best be presented through student/computer interaction. Student/computer material must be supportive of teacher/student interaction; therefore, there is a great need for the effective coordination of the two. The CAI program must be able to support and supplement the teaching program. Independent and non-classroom related ESL materials may only be appropriate for a very small portion of the LEP population.

There has been some speculation about the possible use of audio in English development computer programs. The use of multimedia controlled by the computer is appropriate and feasible for use by LEP populations. These programs are more difficult to develop, however, and can be utilized effectively only with the more sophisticated computer systems, such as the Control Data PLATO software. Unfortunately, at the present time, few school districts are opting for the acquisition of sophisticated mainframe computers for instructional

cont. pg. 6

High Tech - Part II

cont. from pg. 3

purposes and most of the CAI is through the use of microcomputer equipment which offers limited flexibility for multimedia utilization. Needless to say, the microcomputer voice synthesizers are far from adequate for language development purposes.

The development of native language instruction materials for computer utilization presents some unique situations which should be addressed in the materials development process. Some of the LEP children may have a low level of native language development in their native language. If this is the case, it is necessary to make an allowance for this characteristic in the instructional materials. Previous educational errors of assuming language facility that did not exist in the English language should not be repeated in native language instruction. In some cases it may be preferable to include native language development prior to basic skill and content acquisition in that language. In other cases, it may be preferable to go directly into English language development as the shortest distance between two developmental points. At any rate, the final determination would have to be make by a trained instructor on the basis of information available at the time of placement.

Similarly, following transition to English language instruction, the school must make a choice between continued native language maintenance and development, or allowing the loss of the native language followed by the less cost-effective and unproficient reintroduction of the native language as a foreign language. Unfortunately, in the past, this decision has been heavily influenced by myth and misinformation. For years school systems opted to reduce or eliminate the use of the native language in the belief that its use detracted from the ability to acquire a second language. Recent evidence indicates that not only is this not so, but fluency in a language enhances the learning of subsequent languages. Therefore, maintenance and development of the native language will enhance English language acquisition.

The period of transition from native language to English presents unique problems of its own. My biggest concern is that the materials must effectively establish that English language acquisition precedes the transfer. The last thing desired is a repetition of yesteryears' attempts to teach a child a new language, basic skills in that new language, and content material--all at the same time. Lack of coordination of English language acquisition with skill transfer can result in the deplorable educational situations of the pre-bilingual education era.

Appropriateness of Curriculum

Throughout this article it has been stressed that curriculum materials should be appropriate for the target population. The points made about special curriculum materials for computer utilization with LEP children must also take into account the other characteristics of these children.

Children whose native language is other than English tend to have strong cultural orientations which differ markedly from those of mainstream Americans. Instructional materials especially designed for their use must ensure that there is compatibility between the cultural characteristics of the students and the instructional materials. The fact that the materials are designed for CAI does not diminish the need for cultural appropriateness. This appropriateness must be reflected in both the content of the materials as well as the methodology utilized.

A similar appropriateness criterion must be utilized in matching the content and methodology of the materials to the socioeconomic background of the learner. Differing developmental patterns exhibited by economically disadvantaged children must be reflected in the content and methodology employed.

Psychosocial Adjustment

Minority, disadvantaged, and LEP children frequently develop negative concepts of self in school situations. This condition accompanies the frustration and failure encountered by the use of inappropriate instructional programs. Regardless of whether this negativism toward self is developed during the transition from home to school, or is developed and reinforced as the child falls further behind in age/grade achievement levels, the fact that it exists has a strong impact on future learning situations. A child's self-perception as an unsuccessful learner influences the outcome of new learning situations, thereby creating the cumulative deficit phenomenon so characteristic of special populations.

It is interesting to note that this author and Dr. Blandina Cárdenas Ramírez described this problem in 1969. We suggested that instructional activities for minority and disadvantaged children must not only address the skill or content material being taught, but that they must also respond to the negative perceptions of self which may form formidable barriers for future learning. Fourteen years ago we recommended that instructional materials for minority children be designed with a built-in mechanism which could modify these negative perceptions of self. These mechanisms included several suggestions to be incorporated in order to reduce the chances of failure and enhance opportunities for success, such as:

1. complete assurance that all necessary prerequisite skills necessary for success in the new learning activity be mastered,

2. small increments of increasing difficulty in order to minimize chances of failure due to too big a jump in difficulty,

3. necessary cuing or other assistance to prevent further failure and the strengthening of the negative self-concept,

cont. pg. 7

cont. from pg. 6

4. continuous and frequent feedback on performance as the child proceeds through a learning task, and
5. strong, positive reinforcement of correct performance.

It is amazing how CAI can address these needs in the instructional programs for minority children. It appears that technology has finally given the teacher the right tool to develop the positive concept of a successful learner, which in my opinion is the largest stumbling block in minority education.

Implications and Recommendations

The analysis of microcomputer utilization in the public schools reveals the CAI educational programs will definitely have some implications on the opportunity gap existing between the haves and the have-nots in our country's schools. If the movement toward the increased use of high technology in education is not to exacerbate differences already existing, it is necessary that preventive steps be taken. These steps should address the following points.

1. The development of national and state policies on the use of technology in the schools. Policy must be accompanied by the necessary funds and resources for adequate implementation.
2. There is a serious disparity in the accessibility of computers among schools attended by students from varying socioeconomic levels.
3. The amount and the type of participation in the utilization of educational computer programs differs among the various segments of the population.
4. Not all children stand to acquire benefits from the haphazard introduction of computer technology into the schools.
5. Available computer software is not appropriate for special populations such as minorities, the disadvantaged, and the limited English proficient.
6. There is a need to develop new software and to modify or adapt existing software for use by special populations.
7. Computer-assisted instruction can make a contribution to the improvement of educational opportunities if existing problems are addressed.

Resources

Brookover, W. and Lezotte, L., "Educational Equity: A Democratic Principle at a Crossroads," *The Urban Review*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 1981.

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Watt, D., "Education for Citizenship in a Computer-Based Society," in *Computer Literacy*, Seidel, R., Anderson, R. and Hunter, B., eds. NY: Academic Press, 1982. p. 59.

TIP Successes

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task of assisting in the education of their children."

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"I have participated in the training for 4 years. I used to think that I could not participate in school activities because I didn't speak English, but I was wrong. Schools need parents to participate. What I have learned has helped me not only with my children, but will help with my grandchildren when I have them. My attitude has changed. I feel I have a lot to offer. My children have also benefited because now I understand them better and they also want to become involved and benefit just as I have benefited."

• • •

"The first meeting that I attended for the Big Lake Conference, I was feeling nervous. Maria Elena explained what we were going to do. She told us that we would have different centers to share activities with parents so they could keep their children at home. The four districts that participate were Edgewood ISD, San Antonio ISD, Harlandale ISD, and East Central ISD. Everyone was placed with someone from another district. This was a great opportunity because it gave us all a chance to become friends with the other districts. The various times that we were asked to return to IDRA to be trained for the conference my curiosity was growing. I couldn't wait to go and meet all the parents. The day of our parent conference finally arrived on March 27 and we were in Big Lake. The theme of our conference was "Parents As Teachers in the Home" and it was composed of four sessions--Pre-Kindergarten, Primary, Elementary and Secondary. The one factor that impressed me the most was the attendance at the conference of both husband and wife. I discovered when the sessions started how willing they were to learn all the different activities so they could help their children at home. There was also so much interest shown by Mr. White, the Superintendent, and Mr. DeAnda, the Bilingual Education Director, and the principals that were present to make the conference a big success."

It is obvious from these responses that parents are deeply concerned about the education of their children. Parents frequently are motivated by a desire to have their children do well in school, they know those areas they would like to be involved in, and they believe that a greater involvement in their child's education will benefit the child. Parents need both tangible incentives, like accurate information and role clarification, as well as intangible incentives, such as the respect of school personnel for their role as partners in the educational process. Consequently, if the public schools are truly interested in more effective parent participation, they will need to address the needs and concerns of parents, their needs to know more about education, and their roles in the educational process. When parents recognize that their contributions are not only important, but necessary, then and only then will there be a supportive network created among the school, the home, and the community.

Litigation Conference

cont. from pg. 5

aftermath of the working session. META can be reached through its Texas Office headed by David Garza (512-684-9193) or in Massachusetts by calling Roger Rice or Camilo Perez-Bustillo (617-495-4666).

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